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by Frank Wisner

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PARTICIPANTS:

Admiral Emilio Massera, Commander of the Argentine Navy
Mr. David D. Newsom, Under Secretary of State for Political
Affairs

Ambassador Raul Castro
Fernando Rondon, ARA/ECA

DATE: May 24, 1978

Distribution: S, D, ARA, S/P, HA, PM, OSD/ISA, JCS, NSC-Pastor

Admiral Massera had voiced his displeasure to our Embassy through one of his officers, that the Under Secretary had not requested an appointment to see him. The appointment was not requested, however, until President Videla indicated that calls on the Navy and Air Force Junta members, as well as the Supreme Court, would be desirable.

The conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes. The Admiral was dressed impeccably in a blue-pin stripe, tailored suit. He did not require interpreting from English to Spanish but preferred to speak in Spanish during the formal part of the conversation.

The Under Secretary explained the purpose of his mission, to look into the future. He mentioned the difficulties Argentina experienced, including excesses that sometimes come with war. Given the special consciousness about human rights in the United States, it is difficult to justify before Congress actions we might like to take. We want to see whether future developments will enable us to go forward with programs. We have noted Christmas releases, the Deutsch and Timmerman actions, as well as things like the ratification of Tlatelolco. We cannot explain in Washington, however, the question of detainees. The Minister of Interior has urged humane treatment of prisoners, and disappearances and torture have been reduced. But I have impression, Mr. Newsom continued, that there are 1200 to 1500 persons under detention who may be either released or held without trial. This latter situation is hard to explain. Mr. Newsom requested the Admiral's view on how the situation may evolve, whether there would be an early resolution of cases, an early lifting of the state of siege or other actions which might be viewed positively in the United States.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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Admiral Massera replied that he is taking action in the Junta to press for a list of the dead, which would go far in resolving the fate of many disappeared persons. He also said that he believes the small number of political detainees--persons like Mrs. Peron or prominent labor and political figures from the last regime--should be freed. He said he opposed some form of "revolutionary justice" for these figures. Massera said that he favors a return to peace and feels that the Junta should leave a clean slate before it retires from power in March 1979.

Massera complained that he has problems with Polish and Russian ships in Argentine territorial waters, yet he cannot obtain ammunition from the United States to adequately secure Argentina's waters. He joked that he has no intention of using the ammunition against Chile.

The Navy Commander then turned to the politics of nationalism. He stated that it is not easy for Argentina to continue siding with the United States when junior officers resent American actions. It would be very easy to turn the man in the streets against the United States, Massera warned, recalling Juan Peron's 1946 successful electoral campaign against US Ambassador Braden, who publicly attacked Peron.

Mr. Newsom said that it is difficult at times to reconcile political circumstances in one country with political circumstances in another. We have to explain our actions to members of our Congress such as Senator Kennedy, Representative Fraser, and many others. Sometimes the Executive's credibility is not greater than that of outsiders. The United States is not asking any other government to take measures detrimental to its position. He said his effort is to identify areas of US concern and ask what one can expect. There is much positive and some problems, the Under Secretary commented. Mr. Newsom said that he could not predict the effect of his report but he hoped to be fair and objective.

In parting, the Under Secretary acknowledged the long association between the United States and Argentina, the threats we both face, and the importance of Argentina's geographic position. But we have a problem in fitting together two different perspectives, Mr. Newsom concluded.

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